



POCKET PC Expert

A PDA isn't just for organising and planning your life – it's also a great way to have a little fun. Steve Clack looks at some of the games that grown-up children can enjoy on their handhelds



FILMS FOR NEW YEAR

Always a must-have resource for film buffs, an updated 2006 edition of Leonard Maltin's Movie Guide for Pocket PC has now been released. This version expands its film listings to cover more than 21,000 titles, and now includes 'top lists' of recommended films voted by more than 100,000 filmgoers, as well as the brief critical reviews and star ratings provided by Leonard Maltin himself. As with previous editions, the guide also has its own comprehensive database, into which you can enter full details of your own DVD and video collection, including personal reviews, purchase details and so on. It costs \$20 (around £12) from www.landware.com.

FREE MULTIMEDIA PLAYER

TCMP (The Core Pocket Media Player) is open-source, freeware music and video playback software for Pocket PC and Palm OS handhelds (see review, page 266). The latest version supports more file formats than the built-in Pocket PC applications, and handles audio and video within the single application. The product is still in pre-release only, but currently supports the popular MP3, Ogg Vorbis, AC3 and WMA audio formats, MPEG, M-JPEG, WMV, XviD and DivX video, plus a number of other less well-known codecs. It's available for free from <http://tcmp.corecodec.org>.

FREE QUAKE

Quake 3, the top PC shoot-'em-up game, has just been ported to Pocket PCs, and it's available for free – though you must already have a copy of the PC version in order to run it. The port was produced as a testbed for Noctemware's SpeedDemon Windows CE Profiler programming software. The game is still in beta, and comes with the usual associated disclaimers. However, it works on any device running Pocket PC 2003 or later, provided you can spare a rather hefty 124MB of space and have 40MB of free memory. It performs particularly well on the Dell Axim X50v, as it is designed to take advantage of its hardware-accelerated Intel 2700g chipset. Quake is free from www.noctemware.com.

Some PDA users take a snobbish attitude to playing games on their handhelds, as though such 'trivial' leisure activities should be frowned upon. This outlook probably stems from the fact that when many people think of computer games, they imagine youngsters playing Space Invaders shoot-'em-ups. But while there are plenty of such games available, there's much more depth to modern PDA gaming and leisure software.

HEADS UP

For something to stretch your intellectual powers, there are several Pocket PC versions of Sudoku, the logic puzzle game that's been sweeping the nation. Astraware Sudoku is currently the best of the bunch (\$20, around £12, from www.astraware.com), with half a dozen difficulty levels to choose from and an easy way to make onscreen notes. It's every bit as addictive as the paper version and, best of all, you'll never run out of puzzles.



▲ Gamebox Solitaire lets you play anywhere

Inspired by the classic The Incredible Machine for old DOS PCs, The Amazing World (\$15, around £9, from www.amazingworldgame.com) is another great logic puzzle game, but one for which you won't find a pencil and paper equivalent. This is a collection of 71 puzzles, and each one involves placing a variety of objects on the screen to initiate a chain reaction: drop a ball, which rolls down a wall to bounce into a bucket that is attached to a rope that goes around a pulley, which pulls the trigger of a gun and fires it at a rabbit, which actuates a lever – you get the idea. It all makes for a truly original set of brain-teasers, calling for some really creative thinking. The game looks great, too. All the onscreen elements follow the laws of physics with startling precision; balls bounce and buckets swing on ropes. It's offbeat, but enormously entertaining and challenging.

If you prefer word games to logic puzzles, you'll find a few dozen excellent alternatives for Pocket



▲ Practise your strategy with Age of Empires

HINTS & TIPS SPREADSHEETS

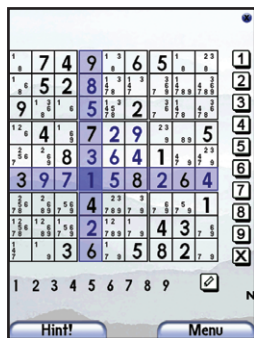
Top tips for Pocket Excel

So many people think of a spreadsheet as a complex mathematical tool, but it is also the perfect way to store shopping lists or anything that belongs in a basic table format, even if your data contains pure text with no numbers at all.

1 For shopping lists, you can fill in a column of things to buy, with prices listed in an adjacent column. You can use the double-headed arrow icon at the bottom of the screen to bring up Pocket Excel's toolbar with the Σ (AutoSum) feature. This adds up your column of numbers and displays the total in the currently selected cell. It helpfully displays a dotted box around the numbers it thinks you want to add up, but if it guesses wrong, just drag your stylus around the correct set of numbers and tap the tick icon in the status bar at the top of the screen.

2 If you don't need a permanent display of the total, you can get a 'live' onscreen total of any block of highlighted numbers. Make sure the Status Bar option is ticked in the View menu, then highlight the block of numbers you want to add up and choose Sum from the pop-up near the bottom-right corner of the screen. Your live total will appear in the box. The other five options in this menu are also handy, as they tell you the total number of items you've highlighted, plus the average, maximum and minimum value of all the numbers in the list.

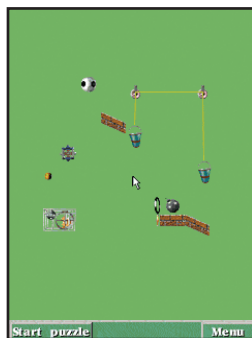
3 If you want to use Pocket Excel to keep sensitive information such as details of bank transactions or loan repayments, remember you can password-protect individual spreadsheets from within the Tools menu. On certain older Pocket PCs, this option appears in the Edit menu.



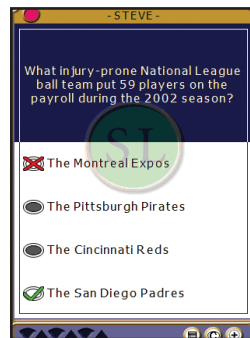
▲ Be a part of the Sudoku craze that's gripping the nation



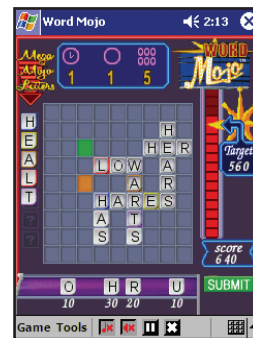
▲ Play Monopoly without a board and you won't be bored



▲ Challenge yourself with Amazing World, the logic game



▲ Trivial Pursuit is available on Pocket PC, but it's the US version



▲ Astraware's Word Mojo helps to while away spare time

PC. As the biggest name on the PDA gaming scene, UK-based Astraware's website is the first place to look for outstanding titles in most genres, and it's unparalleled when it comes to word games. Bookworm, Word Mojo, Text Twist, WordPop, Super Wild Wild Words and WHATword are free to try and cost only around \$15 each if you decide to buy.

GROUP DYNAMIC

If you want something you can enjoy with other people, try the handheld version of Trivial Pursuit (\$30, around £17, from www.handmark.com). This plays just like the board game; the only downside is that the questions are taken from the American edition. As long as you don't mind the inevitable bias towards baseball, American politics and US-only sitcoms, this game is great for long car journeys and even the pub.

You'll find other classic games on the Handmark website, too. There's a superb official version of Monopoly (\$30), Tetris (\$20) and the popular Yahtzee dice game (\$20). There's also a reasonable version of Scrabble, but unfortunately due to licensing issues it's not available for download to users outside the USA and Canada.

If you're a fan of Solitaire, the PDA-based version of the game will save you a lot of time shuffling cards and it doesn't require any table space. Most Pocket PCs have a basic version preinstalled, but GameBox Solitaire (\$15 per pack from www.pdamill.com) is far better. It includes 10 different versions of the game, with another 10 available in a separate Solitaire II pack. Its subtle shading and smooth, animated graphics make it feel like you're playing with a real pack of cards rather than a computer rendition of the game, which adds to the enjoyment.

BIGGER AND BETTER

Most of the games mentioned here can be played for a few minutes at a time in odd spare moments. If you'd prefer something more challenging and time-consuming, the well-known Age of Empires strategy game (\$30, from www.ziosoft.com) is superb, and virtually identical to the PC-based original. It's much more than an animated 3D war game as you're required to farm, fish and manage your resources to build and develop an entire ancient civilisation, fighting neighbouring tribes and using diplomacy to progress from level to level. It

takes a while to master the basics, but there's an excellent tutorial system that makes learning straightforward, so you can be playing a scenario in a few minutes. Age of Empires is hugely absorbing and offers hours of play.

There are also masses of arcade-style games. There's a great collection at www.clickgamer.com, including the wonderfully polished Crazy Jack platform game (\$13, around £8), which shows just how good a PDA game can look.

You're sure to find something that suits your taste and boredom threshold, and most games are reasonably priced. Every Pocket PC owner should investigate the world of entertainment software at least once, even if you just want something to keep you busy during coffee breaks or boring TV ads. **CS**

CONTACT

POCKET PC EXPERT

If there is anything you would like to see covered in *Pocket PC Expert*, please contact us at the address below

pocketpc@computershopper.co.uk

REVIEW DATA INPUT SOFTWARE

PHATWARE CalliGrapher 8

RATING ★★★★★

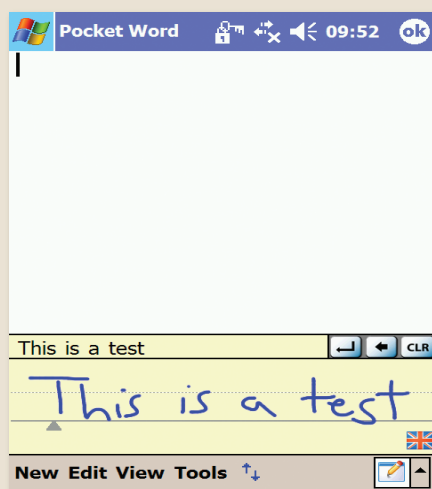
PRICE \$40 (around £23)

DETAILS www.phatware.com

It's so important to be able to enter information into your Pocket PC quickly and effectively. Every Pocket PC comes with four built-in text entry options to choose from. If your own preference is to scribble text directly on to the screen with Transcriber but you can't seem to persuade it to recognise your handwriting accurately, you should try the latest version of CalliGrapher.

This program is based on a more advanced text-recognition engine than Transcriber and does a better job of turning scribbles into properly recognised text, whether you enter words as separate letters or cursive handwriting. There's still a limit to what it can decipher, but if you write reasonably tidily you should have no problem managing at least 95 per cent accuracy, and in most cases performance is even better.

The software makes it easy to correct mistakes when they occur, with a quick pop-up



▲ CalliGrapher's new Write Pad mode

menu of suggested corrections as well as an onscreen keyboard for more serious alterations. The new version adds a brand new Write Pad mode, which lets you write out words in a separate window at the bottom of the screen. By entering letters within the ruled lines of the box you get improved accuracy, though you have to tap on an Enter icon to pass each batch of three or four words

into the underlying application to clear the box ready for the next few words. Most people will prefer the standard Write Anywhere mode, which improves its accuracy by learning from your mistakes (a process that takes a few weeks); this feels more natural than entering text into a defined area. There's plenty of configurability to further hone the program's accuracy, and a macro feature can enter pre-set phrases and sentences using a few onscreen gestures.

However, as well as being thrown by poor handwriting, CalliGrapher can be tripped up by text containing a higher-than-average mix of upper- and lower-case letters, numbers and punctuation. In these cases, it's sometimes better to use the onscreen keyboard. CalliGrapher's version of this offers worthwhile extra features, such as automatic word completion, and can be set to float around the screen if desired.

With a range of text entry alternatives for all occasions, CalliGrapher has a lot to offer, and this new version is easily the best yet.

✓ Recognition accuracy a big improvement on the built-in Transcriber

✗ By no means infallible